

Number 32

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Spring 1985

# REVIEW



VALUE ARCHITECTURE

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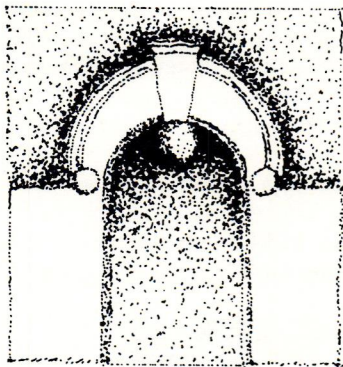
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# I N S I D E



## A Special Sense of Quality: *The architect's emotional/ spiritual/intellectual response*

**T**heme of this June's American Institute of Architects National Convention in San Francisco is "Value Architecture"—a seductive and subjective topic open to many interpretations. Critics, art historians and architects all have different definitions of this concept, but value in architecture is probably clearest when the general public recognizes a project as especially praiseworthy. The commonly held opinion that a building is special is the clearest indication that a project has risen above the mere acceptability.

Many factors contribute to making a building that inspires such respect. The opportunities of the site and program are blended with the restraints of the budget, the local codes, the regional economy and other factors. Enlightened municipal officials sometimes contribute to successful projects, and seldom does a worthwhile building result without discriminating client. Most importantly, the architect must impart a special sense of quality to the building. To varying degrees every design reflects the architect's emotional/spiritual/intellectual response to the situation and the most successful building is often the one endowed with the architect's strong personal sense of what is appropriate.

Value in architecture takes many forms. Buildings can add value because their physical beauty lifts our spirits. The Conservatory at Golden Gate Park is such a structure—a man-made object whose combination of pleasing geometry and lightness yields an impressive elegance.

Sometimes it is the symbiosis of building and site that imparts value. The obvious regional example is the Golden Gate Bridge which frames and enhances the headlands it joins and—dare I say?—improves on nature. Less grand in scale but equally successful is the Rutherford Hills Winery, a building by Roma that gracefully folds itself into an oak-covered hillside above Napa Valley.

Sensitive selection of building materials often yields a richness that continually pleases both user and observer; in other instances it is an assemblage of buildings that is highly valued. The rows of Victorian houses in San Francisco's residential neighborhoods are praised less, I suspect, for the merits of each individual structure than for the fabric that they create when taken as a whole.

Other buildings and places are perceived as valuable less for their physical properties than for the human social interaction they create. Embarcadero Center's podium levels probably violate some basic principles of retail design but succeed wonderfully for people—largely, I believe, because of the intensity of the use they receive.

Value is almost never absolute in something as complex as a building.



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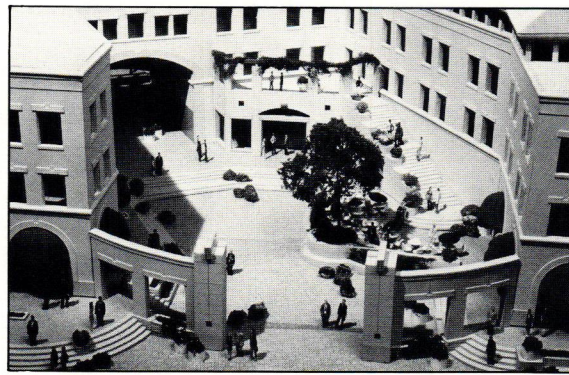
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Some buildings add value only from certain points of view. The Transamerica Tower contributes mightily to the San Francisco skyline and has undeniably become a symbol of the city. Up close Transamerica is less successful. Its ponderous presence on the street is not viewed as an urban amenity.

In other projects the best efforts of the architects fail to produce maximum gain for society because of cutbacks in the budget or changes in program that make the building socially inappropriate to its community. Moscone Center represents the concerted efforts of excellent designers trying to overcome a questionable program. The result, particularly when compared to earlier proposals, is largely a lost opportunity for this community.

Fortuitously, sometimes society lets architects rethink earlier mistakes and gives them a second opportunity. The skillful conversion by Marquis Architects of the 1950s Pink Palace Housing project into Rosa Parks Apartments is such a case. The original building (not designed by



Corte Madera Town Center, Field/Gruzen Architects.

Marquis) is one of those dreadfully inappropriate by-products of the International Style's approach to mass housing. It was sensitively re-worked into a pleasing home for the elderly and its successful transformation represents another kind of value architecture.

Basic to all of these examples of value architecture is the application by the architect of his intellectual training and his emotional response to the site and programs. Buildings of worth represent investments of both the intellect and heart, and it is this ability to impact humanity in their designs that is perhaps the best service any architect gives a project. Certainly it has long been a prevalent concern among Bay Area Architects.

To help understand this approach, the *Review* has assembled some thoughts on value in architecture. We asked John Field, FAIA for his personal reflections. During his 30 years of practice in San Francisco, Field has consistently demonstrated a commitment to designing quality spaces for human use, particularly recently in his innovative approach to shopping center design. Architects of the Bay Area have a reputation for successful multi-family residential projects. Sally Woodbridge has asked four prominent architects to discuss their approaches to housing design. Their comments are included as are the personal observations of Charles Moore, FAIA about what he values most highly in San Francisco.

Lest we be considered uninvolved, the editorial board of *Review* has added its two cents by compiling a short walking tour of some of the places and structures we most admire. Arthur Chandler has taken a similar excursion through San Francisco's history, writing about the signature buildings of the city's past. Finally, we have included a gentle reminder that the architect's role, while important, is not the only determinant and that some of our most prized local features are unplanned. Value is where one finds it—and we trust you will find plenty in this *Review*.

—Michael Stanton



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# THE BAY REGION STYLE

## ‘Firmly and Confidently Rooted in Unresolved Contradictions’

BY JOHN FIELD, FAIA

**I**N 1955, SHORTLY after I had moved to San Francisco, an architect friend of mine in New York asked me if I didn't feel that I had moved to the "end of the world." I admitted that I did sometimes, but I should have added, "Thank God. We're lucky we aren't of any interest to that little world of the East Coast."

If you came from East of the Mississippi, in that year, the East Coast from Boston to Philadelphia was the center of most intellectual thought about architecture. There were exceptions.

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Chicago had Mies, SOM, and Harry Weese. There was another beachhead in Los Angeles where John Entenza was editing *Arts and Architecture* and promoting the work of the few modernists like Craig Ellwood, whose elegant pavilion houses were essentially Western in their spirit and Eastern in their steel structure. There were individuals in



Henrik Bull's Sims House, Woodside: Tailored to the West and its special lifestyle.



other parts of the country whose work was of interest in the East, but it was clear that no one would have described the architecture of the Bay Region as "modern."

San Francisco's geographical remoteness from the center of Eastern opinion put it outside the main current of interest to the publications. As if isolated on a safe hilltop above the malarial swamp, the architects remained healthy and independent of the pressure to be interesting to Eastern editors and schools. Isolated, architects were free to explore and develop our own sense of design.

My sense is that by 1955 the aura of lonely adventure was wearing off and the Bay Region style was making a transition to a period of refinement. The work of William Wurster and the group at Wurster, Bernardi and Emmons epitomized this metamorphosis. They had a split personality which led the office to alternate designs between simple, unself-conscious beach houses and elegant, finely detailed city houses that grace many streets of Pacific Heights and Russian Hill today. As larger commissions (like the Golden Gateway) presented different opportunities, WB&E tried to apply the lessons of one scale of work to another. It seems important to me that the Wurster office didn't abandon one style and move to another. Towards the end of the period when all three principals were still practicing, all three kinds of projects were being produced simultaneously.

▼

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FOR THE BAY AREA.**



Robert Brundis

**T**HAT FIRM should be looked at along with one other figure, Thomas Church, the preeminent landscape architect who worked with all of the Bay Area architects in San Francisco after World War II. He set the stage for a vital dialogue that was clearly expressed in the contradictory attitudes one can see in his work. Church made harmony of seeming unrelated philosophies. Time and again he would create a setting that seemed perfectly natural for an unimposing simple redwood house, yet he used a vocabulary from the neoclassic tradition with symmetry and axes, edged with boxwood hedges that could as easily have been suitable for an 18th-century English manorhouse. Somehow the designs looked appropriate and fit that informal outdoor lifestyle that was a basic part of the West.

The generation of architects coming on the scene in 1955 inherited the contradictions that never seemed to need resolution by the Bay Region's first generation of postwar modern architects. Diversity was as logical as the reality that summer in San Francisco was colder than the winter. We were finding an architecture to fit a lifestyle for which nature offered beaches and skiing on alternate weekends.

It was hard to remain attached to a single viewpoint without questioning what we were doing. Like Wurster, we tried to explore the divergencies we found in our feelings and attitudes. Our



Meynard L. Parker

**Above:** Architectural Offices, Don Knorr, FAIA, and Associates, Architects.

**Below:** Shainwald House, Wurster Bernardi and Emmons, Architects.  
Thomas Church, Landscape Architect.



work changed as we accumulated diversity in our own style.

The complexities and contradictions that Venturi wrote about in the Sixties were an essential part of the Bay Region style from its very beginning but for us they were intuitive rather than analytical. Don Knorr's elegant, quiet designs and Don Olsen's powerful rectangular volumes expressed similar sensibilities about surfaces and materials and yet seem as different from each other as they were from the work of Henrik Bull.

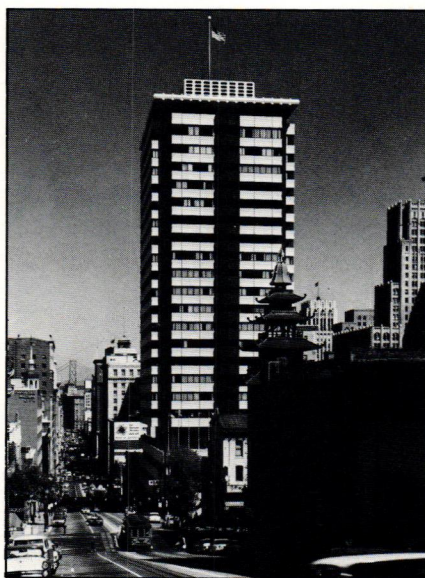
No champion of redwood and natural shingles won more awards or became better known in the '50s and '60s than Bull. His residential designs epitomized what seemed to many people to be appropriate for the Bay Area. He was often published by *Sunset*, a magazine whose sense of quality in design was tailored to the West and its special lifestyle. Along with others such as Warren Callister, Bull represented to the public a kind of design that fit the life that people pictured for themselves.

**B**AY AREA architecture, in all this diversity, grew from two contrary currents that to me seem uniquely part of their time and place. Perhaps the architecture was no more than a mirror of its public which at that moment shared the same delight in endless choices.

One side was a conservative one and an emotional one that prized the natural beauty of the state. It was the powerful attraction of nature in California

▼

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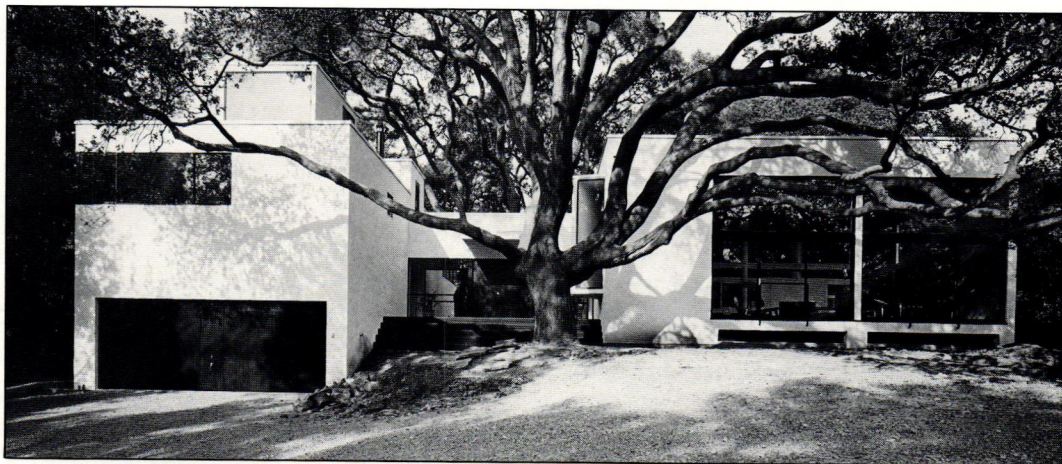
that had its most profound impact on architecture. Greene and Greene, Maybeck, Coxhead and Julia Morgan left a foundation upon which the architects after the second World War built a sense of what was appropriate for the Bay Area.

On the other hand California was the last frontier. The cities we know today were really built only within the last 40 years. San Francisco, San Jose and Los Angeles had existed for many years but they had suddenly grown to become today's large cities and their suburban areas had been almost rural until the postwar plywood rush started in the 1950s. That wave of building hit the whole state with the same explosive impact as discovering gold had 100 years before.

For the second time California was a frontier with a mentality that believed that anything was possible. "New" was good. "Bigger" was better. Deserts could become farms and new forests could be seeded. Taste was individual and idiosyncratic and didn't depend on what someone else said it should be. That was another side of being in California.

It was in this urbanizing California emerging in the late '60s that these divergent sensibilities came together into tentative equilibrium in the architecture of Sea Ranch and the work of MLTW. They belonged to neither camp and yet to both and they captured the mood of their times in the reinterpretation of each. With that project the currents seemed one.

The planning of Sea Ranch was also guided by the fine hand of Joseph Esh-



Ronald Partridge

**Above:** International House, Anshen and Allen, Architects.

**Below:** Ruth House, Donald E. Olsen, FAIA, Architect.





Left: Henderson House, Wurster Bernardi and Emmons, Architects. Right: Golden Gateway, Wurster Bernardi and Emmons, Architects.



erick whose work over the years has been the embodiment of these contrary California currents. His designs seem to seek out the contradictions rather than following one side and then the other. Each design confronts the duality and creates from it a distinctive

style.

The concurrent flourishing of these divergent attitudes continued and gave the '60s the same kind of vitality we see today when architecture is more permissive and eclectic than at any time since the exuberant Victorian era. What

began basically on a residential scale, nonetheless influenced the thinking of architects doing large-scale work. Anshen and Allen's International Building was an early effort to bring the sensibilities of their residential work to an office tower and the bay windows on the Bank of America tower seem to be Skidmore, Owings and Merrill's way of looking beyond the familiar finely detailed box to the bays on Victorian houses on the hills above downtown.

The combination of historical antecedents and the Bay Area architects' independent excursion out of the mainstream has generated a unique public consciousness of belonging to regional style, created to fit a way of life that includes good design as an essential component. It is perhaps the only architectural movement in the last 50 years to be adopted by the public as part of its sense of the community it lives in. One has only to look at the housing Joe Eichler built for a mass market in the late 1950s to see the truth of this. It would be years until developers in most Eastern communities could find a market, as he had found, that would buy on the basis of design. That, after all, is one test of value in architecture and a lasting statement about the importance of architecture in its community. □



*John Field, FAIA, is chair of the National AIA Design Committee and a partner of Field/Gruzen.*

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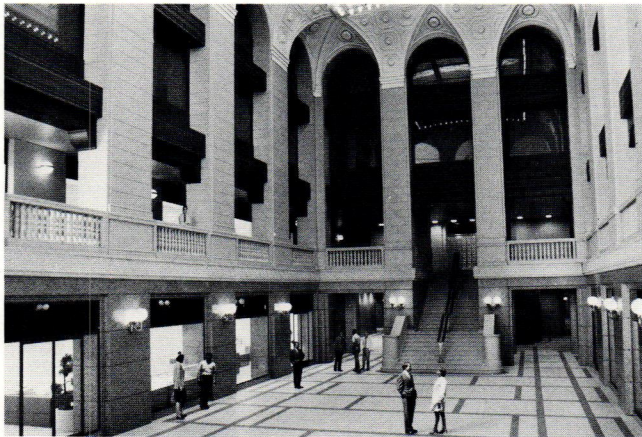


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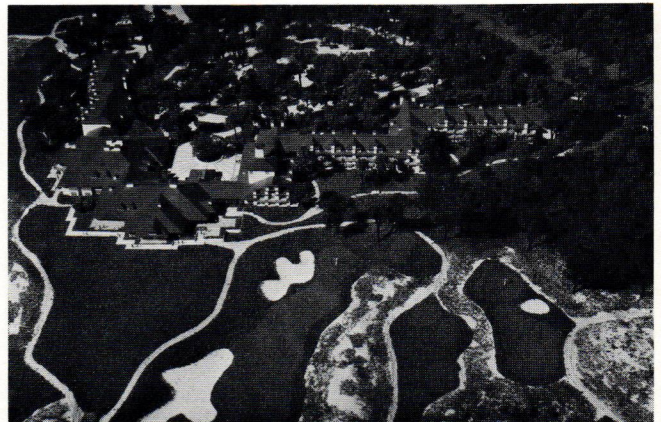
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# VALUES IN HOUSING: 'A Question of How Ideals Are Regenerated Through Practice'

A PANEL DISCUSSION by Peter Calthorpe, Rodney Friedman, Donlyn Lyndon, and Dan Solomon, moderated by Sally B. Woodbridge, scheduled for June 12.

BY SALLY B. WOODBRIDGE

**P**eter Calthorpe, Rodney Friedman, Donlyn Lyndon, and Dan Solomon will participate in a June 12 panel discussion on values, goals, and ideals in the field of housing. As the panel's organizer I invited these four architects because I believe that they can articulate somewhat different perspectives on a complex subject.

One of the challenges now posed by a discussion of values in housing is how to get beyond the expression of platitudes about decency, efficiency, security, and various kinds of amenities to what we might call workable values.

To start with, the design of housing seems a particularly humane endeavor. Yet, instead of being a basic value, "humaneness" has come to signify an amenity. The rub is economics: what seems humane on the drafting board may not appear in the budget as "good value." (We are excluding here the category of housing for private clients who can afford the full humane treatment.) But since a discussion of how values become depressed by cost accounting is hardly stimulating, it seemed more fruitful to ask the panelists to discuss how their values have survived or evolved, given the tests and trials of actual experience. Toward this end, the panelists have provided the following statements as introductions to the event, which we hope readers will attend.

Peter Calthorpe's practice in the field of housing began in a period of activism involving both social and envi-

ronmental concerns. In association with Sim Van Der Ryn, Calthorpe dedicated his skills to the design of housing as an aspect of urbanism. His central concern has been the creation of housing in the service of a socially and ecologically responsive community.

*"Our current patterns of settlement, which focus on private space, are quite resource inefficient. Land use, transit demands, energy, and material needs are greater for low density, single family developments than higher density, mixed use equivalents. The clustering imperative born of these environmental constraints inherently raises the issues of common space and shared facilities. . . . It is the shared ground, responsibilities and systems at the community scale which offers the potential for a more benign form of human settlement both socially and environmentally."*

According to Rodney Friedman, the profile of his practice with Robert Fisher has followed that of post-World War II housing. When the practice was established in 1964, single-family houses were still the standard commodity. Beginning in 1966, new Planned Unit Development ordinances in California prompted the firm's shift to larger projects. These projects increasingly incorporated community centers and shopping facilities, the nuclei of towns. Though widely acclaimed as one of the handful of top firms in the field of housing design, Fisher-Friedman cannot rest on its laurels because, according to Friedman, the field is constantly changing. What does "change" mean in terms of values? Not big waves, apparently, but rather subtle ripples in the cultural wake.

*"I try to look for traces of behavioral patterns that have existed and now exist in housing and to incorporate those patterns in designs which meet modern-day technologies and lifestyles. We try to submerge our 'authorship role,' organizing (or rearranging, if necessary) the priorities for each project to establish a desired universal level of quality."*

Fisher-Friedman's savvy with clients and developers is well known. Yet Friedman says that this savvy comes from ded-

Photograph: Promontory Point, Fisher Friedman Associates, Architects.



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ication to a process, not just "feeling for it." Setting style aside, the process defines eight aspects which are dealt with on a consistent basis: financial, geometric, mathematical, behavioral, aesthetic, ecological, sociological, and political. Each aspect is formulated in a model which can be evaluated by the designers and the clients.

It seems fair to presume that such superrational processes are derived pragmatically, after the fact of experience rather than before. In any case, the system has produced an astonishing result in such a quixotic field: 80 percent of Fisher-Friedman's clients return for more.

Donlyn Lyndon's practice also dates from the early 1960s. Though most of his experience has been with individual clients, his relatively recent partnership with Marvin Buchanan has produced multiunit housing projects in both the private and public sectors.

Briefly stated, Lyndon's chief concern is, "How to make places that people can call home." Sounds simple, but if it were simple to do there would be no reason for this discussion. The ingredients of this recipe, light, outlook, ease of movement, a chance to claim things—to make choices—and connection to a community, also seem so obvious that we wonder why they are not always readily available. It turns out that in elaborating these ingredients, Lyndon is also defining a role for the architect that is reasonably heroic, given the usual constraints on time, money, and energy. Light is not merely what comes in an opening; it is also "the shifting patterns and tonalities . . . [which] signal relationships to the immediate surroundings. . . . It makes everything else in a place come alive." Outlook "is specific, filled with information about the collective of which it is a part, and crucial to the sense of differentiation that real places must develop. . . . Looking from inside to out and from outside to in is a form of social exchange that needs subtle modulation. . . . Movement contributes to the sense of underlying ease that is essential to feeling at home. The core movements in a place should be compact but gracious, not harshly channeled; this does not necessarily equate with 'an efficient' core." Making choices is tied to creating a feeling of dignity. "Any housing community should include several forms of dwelling organization to allow for differences in living patterns and interests. . . . There must be space in which to improvise; niches, ledges and boundaries to collect the inhabitants' ongoing attention." As for the connection to community, ". . . it makes more sense to fit new housing in among existing community and weave a common place than to isolate and segregate new construction from old. . . ." As Lyndon observes, the incentives are to do less. We look forward to hearing what it takes to do more.

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## THE RUB IS ECONOMICS; WHAT SEEMS HUMANE ON THE DRAFTING BOARD MAY NOT APPEAR IN THE BUDGET AS "GOOD VALUE."

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Dan Solomon began his career fifteen years ago imbued with the tradition of Modernism fostered by Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright, both of whom he still reveres. What he lost was his reverence for the ideology that spawned a typology of "mass-produced postwar housing [which] twists away from the public street to private prairies and leaves a public wasteland where one sees no one."

Solomon wants to exchange this typology for one which reestablishes the historical continuity of cities like San Francisco in which the best parts, as he put it, maintain the Mexican colonial grid of  $100 \times 150$  varas blocks ( $275 \times 412.5$  feet) with a typical lot frontage of 25 feet. The standardized building produced by this lot size has two bays, one of which is the entrance, and two or three dwelling units stepping up and down the hills.

To substantiate his ideas, Solomon served as consultant to the San Francisco Planning Department designing demonstration projects to aid in the formulation of a new zoning ordinance, enacted in 1978. Since then the firm has designed many in-fill projects, seven of which have been built.

Solomon also eschews style as a value. Observing that, "Many architects (mostly American) now want to make an architecture from iconography and the pictorial part of history," he concludes:

*"For me, it is significant that places which are the locus for the most vivid memories of urban life are not particularly interesting pictorially. . . . To a great extent it is not the quality of surface or decoration but the basic typological organization of streets, courtyards, passages, and gardens that make them the subject of memory. . . ."*

Values and goals serve practice. Without them, architects would be a dispirited lot, and certainly at times they are. The question of how ideals are regenerated through practice is one we hope to answer on June 12. □

■  
*Sally Woodbridge is a widely published architectural journalist and co-author of Bay Area Houses.*



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# THE SIGNATURE BUILDINGS OF SAN FRANCISCO

## The Structures That Have Defined the City's Skyline, Identified

BY ARTHUR CHANDLER

DRAWINGS BY JOHNNY LEE

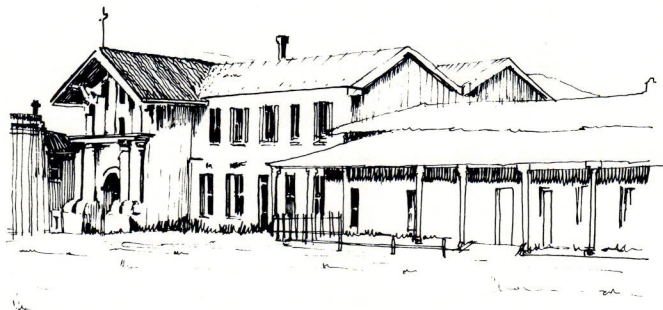
**E**VERY CITY HAS a signature building: a single structure that defines the skyline, and thereby sets the theme and mood of the city's character. In the early years of a city's growth, it is usually a religious building that dominates the landscape: the temple at Luxor, the great ziggurat at Borsippa, the Hagia Sophia. In the passage of time, massive palaces and ambitious public buildings may come to rival the temples' dominion over the cityscape. In North American civilization, commercial buildings have grown from modest structures into colossal hives of enterprise, lording it over the city and symbolizing the paramount importance of business in the life of the nation.

Five signature buildings have defined San Francisco since 1776: the Mission Dolores, the Montgomery Block, the Palace Hotel, the Ferry Building, and the Transamerica Pyramid. The story of the changes from one signature building to another condenses and symbolizes the brief span of the city's life.

### THE MISSION DOLORES

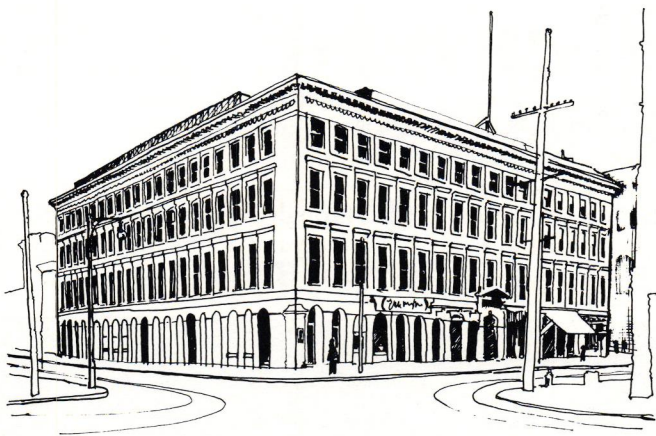
THE BIRTH OF San Francisco is but a small chapter in the epilogue to the Spanish empire. When the Mission Dolores was founded in 1776, it represented the last, waning

hope of Catholic Spain to combine economic advantage with the religious zeal to convert and save the savage nations. The original structure was replaced in 1791 by the present structure, designed by Father Francisco Palou in 1782. Made from the local earth itself—adobe, later stuccoed over to protect the crumbling substance of this first and most sacred building of San Francisco—the Mission



San Francisco de Assis preserves the religious and colonial origins of the city. When the Americans took over California in 1846, the flag was raised in the little village of Yerba Buena, the little village of 459 souls at the Bay's edge, several miles from the Mission Dolores. But so strongly was the authority of the Mission that the name of the village itself was officially changed to "San Francisco" in 1847. The thick-walled bastion of the missionaries had forever put its stamp on the unfranciscan city about to be born.





## THE MONTGOMERY BLOCK

IN 1853, Henry Halleck and his architect, George Cummings, designed and built the largest building west of the Mississippi. The Montgomery Block was the most ambitious architectural project ever undertaken in San Francisco, and the story of the life and times of this building is one of the great local legends. The labor and materials of the building were as diverse and international as the population itself. Chinese workers cleared the ground for the foundation: redwood timbers were fastened together and floated over as a raft from Marin County. Cement from England, ironworks from Mexico, glass from France and Belgium—all finally orchestrated into a massive office building that was meant to house the leading new business and law firms of the growing city.

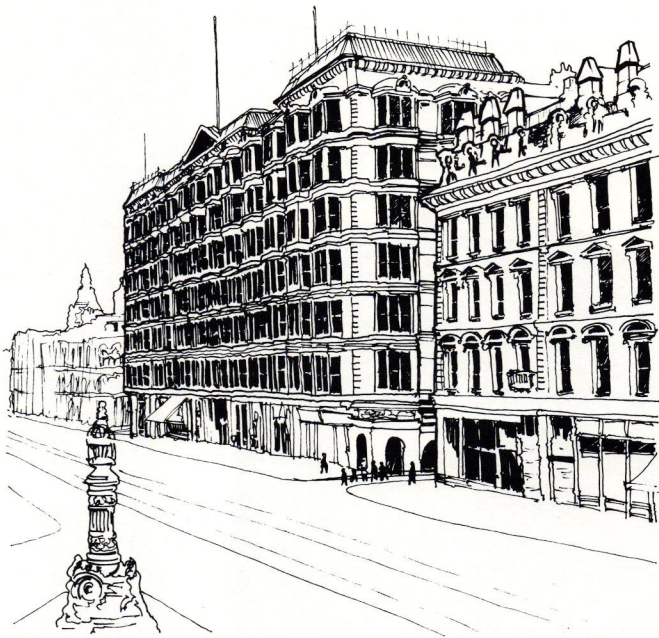
As the decades progressed, though, the life of the building took a typically San Francisco left turn. As other office buildings began to draw tenants away from the Montgomery Block, the Bohemians moved in. By the end of the century, this serious “ark of empire” housed painters, poets, low-rent Italian restaurants, and a bevy of strange characters. Designed to resist fire, the Montgomery Block survived the 1906 disaster with minor damage—only to be torn down to make way for a parking lot in 1959.

## THE PALACE HOTEL

IN A SPIRIT of bravado so typical of the last century, William Ralston and his architect, John Gaynor, set out to make their Palace Hotel the signature building of San Francisco.

They succeeded. When the structure was completed in 1875, it completely dominated the skyline of the city, its girth and height seemingly designed for a city several times the size of San Francisco. The locals loved the Palace. For them, it was a physical manifestation of their ambitions. Never once in its 31-year history were the 755 rooms of the Palace filled. But visitors and natives alike loved to stroll through its grandiose inner courtyard, or dine in the spacious, light-flooded Grand Court.

Some visitors, though, were not impressed with the “elegant hugeness” of this building. One newspaperman wrote back to his home office in New Jersey that as you enter the Palace, you see “150 beautiful clerks behind a solid rosewood counter a quarter of a mile in length.” When you are shown to one of the “25,000 rooms,” said the reporter, you would find the latest conveniences:



*“There are 25,000 bellboys, one for each room, and numbered. They are located in a large basement room communicating with the office-boys trap-doors. When a bell is rung by some impatient lodger in want of something, down goes the clerk’s foot on a corresponding pedal and up shoots a bellboy. Sometimes a dozen or so rise at once. He is put in a box, shut up in a pneumatic tube and whisked into the room designated by the bell dial. A door in the wall opens to receive him, an automatic clamp catches him by the coat-collar; and he is quietly dropped to the floor.”*

The Palace Hotel was destroyed by fire in 1906. Its descendant, the Sheraton-Palace, occupies the same land, but not the same place in the hearts of San Franciscans.



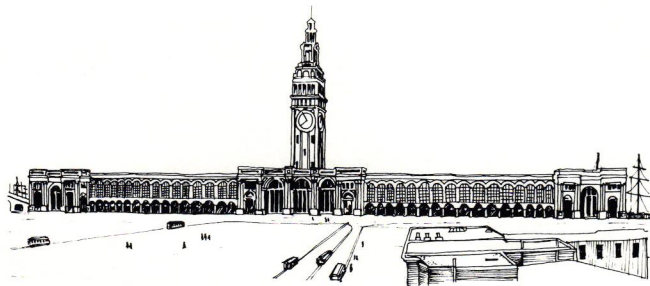
## THE FERRY BUILDING



EVEN BEFORE THE fire and earthquake eliminated the “fabulous

and foolish” Palace, another structure had taken its place as the signature building of the San Francisco skyline. In 1903, San Francisco had a new signature building: the ferry Union Depot, paid for by the state of California and designed by Arthur Paige Brown. Rising 235 feet into the air, the lordly tower of the Ferry Building gave a natural focal point to Market Street. In the decades since its completion, the Ferry Building was immigrants’ first close view of their adopted city.

In an important sense, the Ferry Building was the bridge between the past and future of San Francisco. Its massive arched colonnade at the base and the Spanish origins of the tower suggested that the City of San Francisco remained faithful to its classical heritage. But, as architectural historian Marvin Nathan has pointed out, the tower also represents a commitment to the future of American architecture and the vertical urges of the skyscraper. The Ferry Building quickly became another relic of the past. With the



drastic decline of commuter traffic on the ferries, the importance of the Ferry Building waned. When the post-World War II Embarcadero Freeway sliced away the unobstructed view of the structure, it ceased to be the signature building of San Francisco.

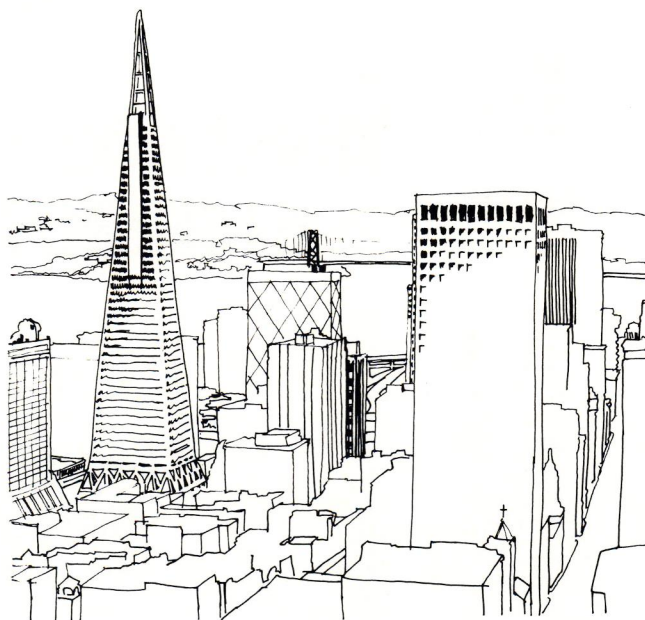


## THE TRANSAMERICA PYRAMID



THE SKYLINE OF San Francisco in the twentieth century retells

the story of the silhouette of every major American city in the twentieth century: the dominance of international business. The two bridges may remain the romantic ideals of the signature of San Francisco’s skyline. But the building that most truly tells the tale is the Transamerica Pyramid.



cisco skyline shows at once that the Pyramid is the most distinctive building in the city—even though very few people have any idea of the kinds of concerns the corporation represents. When the building was completed in 1972, many local critics complained that it was yet another imposition on the skyline by an outlander architectural firm (William Pereira and Associates from Los Angeles)—a building whose only virtue was that it distracted the attention from the dark and monumentally obtrusive Bank of America building, completed a few years earlier.

The Pyramid, though, has proved to be an extremely artful and clever example of corporate planning. Its distinctive shape at once gave the building—and therefore the corporation—dramatic visibility. The mere fact that the Transamerica Corporation could afford to “waste” so much space is in itself a sign that a grand gesture may be worth more, in terms of public visibility, than pennypinching efficiency. At night, when the elegantly tapered Pyramid glows from the lights within, it assures that San Francisco is a city apart, where the best things are done with flair and elegance.

It is fitting that, on the east side of the Pyramid you can still find an echo of the old Montgomery Block, which stood where the Pyramid stands today, encompassing the commercial vitality, extravagance, dreaming and scheming that lie at the core of San Francisco’s character. These buildings have signed San Francisco’s name with a bold flourish.



*Author, filmmaker and musician, Arthur Chandler, Ph.D., is a professor of humanities at San Francisco State University, where he has served as a guiding spirit behind both the university’s Urban Mission and its trailblazing portrait-of-the-city course, simply and elegantly entitled “San Francisco.”*





As you continue down Market Street, look closely at the historic street lamps; their bas reliefs depict the settling of California.

**444 Market's** (a.k.a. the Shaklee Building) smooth, waterlike curtainwall is perhaps the city's most sensuous. Its rippling plan was taken from Shaklee's corporate logo.

- 10** Juxtaposed around the corner is Phillip Johnson's faceted cylindrical tower, **101 California**, a fitting skyline partner to the broad-shouldered Bank of America and the Transamerica Pyramid. Its wedge-like atrium/lobby is unhappily wedged at its base.

- 11** Across Market Street, the 1982 **Federal Reserve Bank** and its stately Renaissance palace neighbors, the Pacific Gas and Electric (1925) and Matson Building (1921), continue a gentlemanly procession down Market Street.

- 12** The **Hyatt Regency** lobby is one of John Portman's best lobbies-as-entertainment. The vast, stepped polygon interior creates its own city of hotel room corridor "streets" and balconies overlooking the action in the piazza below. The shifting perspectives of the interior from the glass elevators culminates in a rotating bar/restaurant with a tower-eye view of the Financial District and the Bay Bridge.

wonderful Dubuffet sculpture of a woman is just to the right of the Hyatt.

Embarcadero Center's four fraternal towers are linked by three levels of shops and restaurants and is a great spot for people and view watching. At Embarcadero Center Two, across the elevated pedestrian walkway to the **Alcoa Building** (1964), a dark, diagonally braced

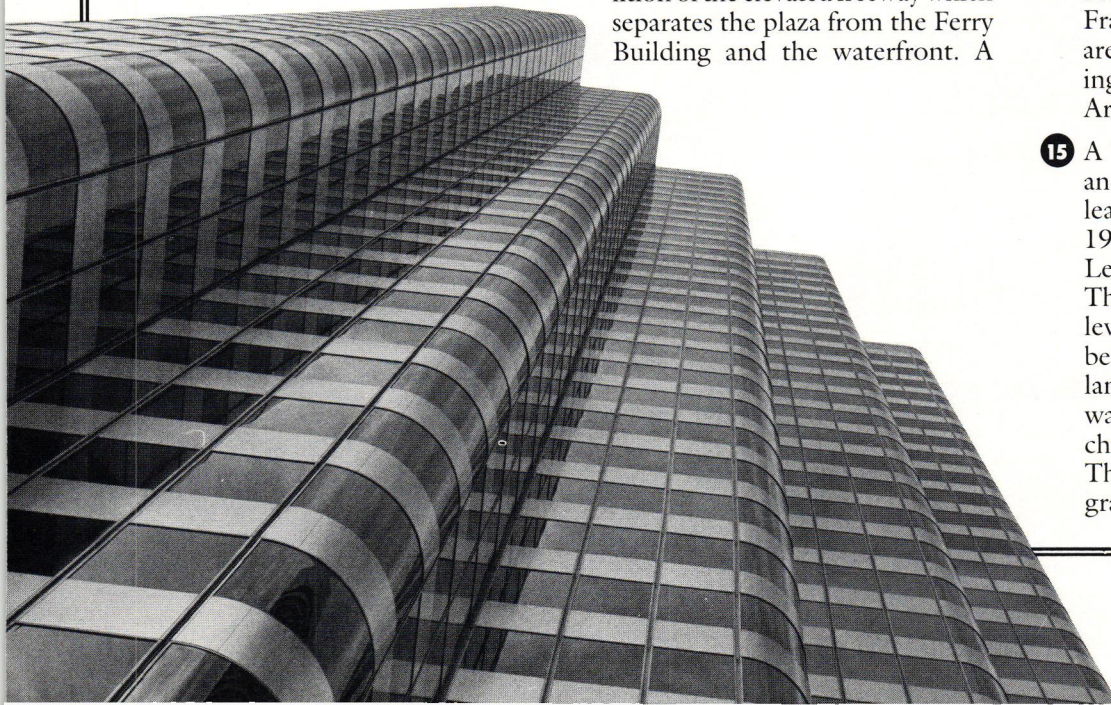
**14**



Continue to the mid-lobby exit for **Embarcadero Center** (1967-1981), also by Portman. To your right, overlook Justin Herman Plaza and sculptor Armand Villaincourt's concrete fountain which anticipated the now planned demolition of the elevated freeway which separates the plaza from the Ferry Building and the waterfront. A

tower elevated above the street, whose quiet plaza contrasts with the activity at Embarcadero Center. Another elevated bridge takes you through Golden Gateway's mix of high- and low-rise housing to **Sidney Walton Park**. A favorite brown bag lunch retreat for San Franciscans. Surrounding the park are several trendy eateries including Ciao, Square One, and MacArthur Park.

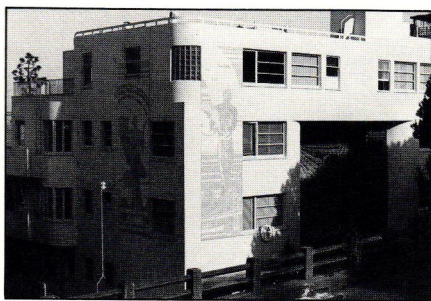
- 15** A block down from Pacific Street and right four blocks on Battery leads you to **Levi's Plaza** (HOK, 1982), the campuslike setting for Levi-Strauss World Headquarters. The brick-clad buildings' terraced levels accentuate Telegraph Hill behind it. The park and plaza by landscape architect Larry Halprin was an instant hit among joggers, children and lunchtime workers. The park's form recalls the Sierra granite rocks and streams where





Levi's first customers panned for gold in their Levi's.

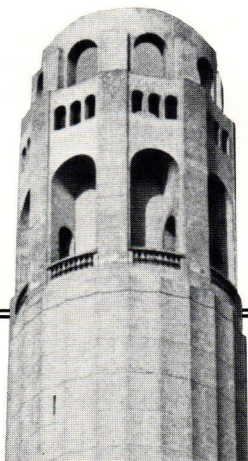
- 16** Out of the plaza entrance and across Sansome Street and you're ready for the romantic **Filbert Street Steps**, the setting of many mystery and movie scenes. Charming turn-of-the-century wood cottages flank the steps and the lush garden they pass through.



- 17** At Montgomery Street, glance admiringly back to the Bay Bridge (1936), Treasure Island (home to the 1939 Exposition), the city of Berkeley across the Bay. **1360 Montgomery** (1931) at the top of the stairs, is considered the choicest Art Deco apartment building in San Francisco.

- 18** The next block of stairs takes you to **Coit Tower**, another monument from the 1930s, a decade that re-created the image of San Francisco. The interior contains many noted W.P.A. murals; but the breathtaking, top-of-the-world view highlights the tour.

- 19** Leaving Coit Tower and heading west back to the Filbert Steps is an unusual view of downtown San Francisco. The skyline here is dominated by the Transamerica Pyramid, the dark, formidable Bank of America World Headquarters, and the Siamese twin top of **345 California** now under construction.



- 20** Continuing down the Filbert Steps into North Beach is the colorful **Garfield School** by Esherick, Holmsey, Dodge, and Davis, an updated example of the Bay Area style in its informal and wood-beamed pergola. The rusticated arch was styled after the original school's entrance.

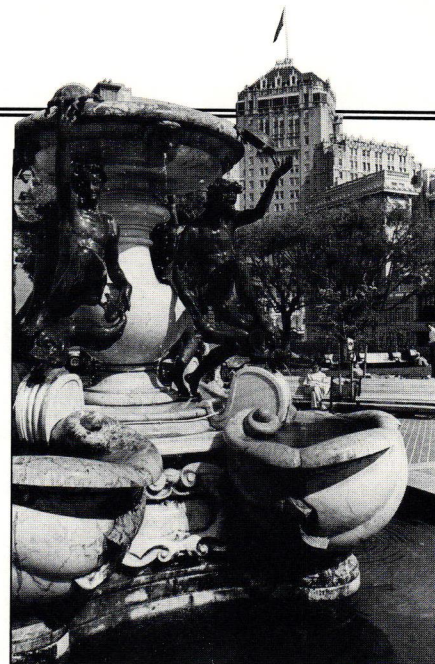
- 21** One block further and a right at Stockton Street brings you to the **Bernard Maybeck Building** (1908) by and named after the master of the Bay Area style. Note the wood detailing and use of nature in its open courtyard and flower-boxed facade windows.

- 22** **Washington Square** is gateway to the European ambience of North Beach, with its heralded cafes and Italian delicatessens. Local literati and politicians hang out at the Washington Square Bar and Grill, just across Columbus Avenue.



- 23** After leaving North Beach, board a cable car on Mason Street uphill to Powell, the top of Nob Hill. This is formal, old society San Francisco and home of the great hotels, including the diagonally sited **Mark Hopkins** (1925) with its view-rich top level bar and the **Fairmont**, built in 1906 and restored a year later after the quake by Julia Morgan. The lobby, now seen weekly on the television series *Hotel*, and the city view from the exterior glass elevators, are San Francisco treats.

- 24** Across from the Fairmont is the brownstone **Pacific Union Club**, which survived the 1906 Quake and Fire. Next door is Huntington Park, its classical layout reflecting the surrounding hilltop architecture.



- 25** The Seismic Gothic **Grace Cathedral** (1911), of reinforced concrete, majestically crowns this composition. The entrance doors are replicas of Ghiberti's bronze doors in the Baptistry of Florence, Italy.

- 26** Continue by cable car to **Union Square**, the retail heart of San Francisco. The unwritten roofline conformity and vivacious neon signs surrounding the park-covered underground garage gives Union Square its Euro flavor.

- 27** Maiden Lane, mid-block at Stockton Street, houses the **Circle Gallery** (formerly Morris Gift Shop), by Frank Lloyd Wright, a 1949, Guggenheim predecessor. Originally jewelry was displayed in small cases around the ramp.

- 28** The harlequin gift-box facade of **Neiman Marcus** (Phillip Johnson, 1982) replaced the old City of Paris Building but appropriated its stained glass oval rotunda, which can be seen from the corner entrance.

The tour is approximately 3 hours nonstop. But don't do it that way. Stop, by all means, for gazing, refreshment and reflection en route.



*Janice Pregliasco and Stacey Nichol are rising young architects in San Francisco. Victor Smeltz is a project architect and photographer for Hornberger Worstell.*

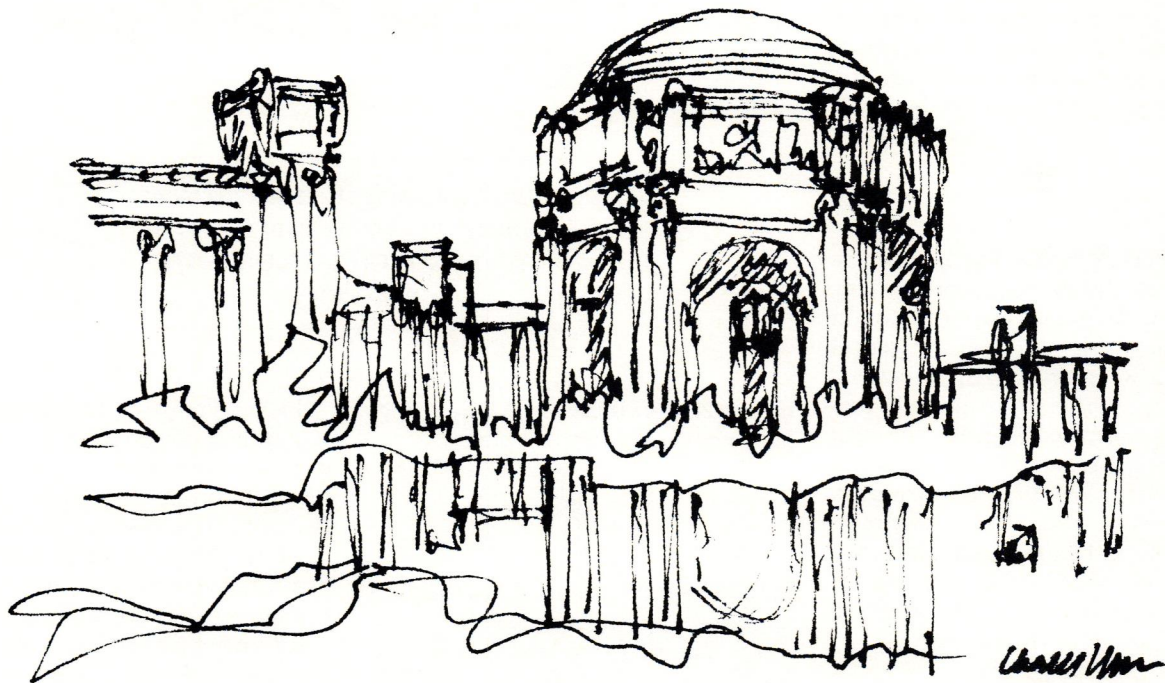


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## CHARLES MOORE, FAIA:

‘San Francisco Is Perhaps the  
Best City in the World to Look  
at From Some Distance Away’

FROM AN INTERVIEW BY WAYNE ATTOE



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MAYBECK'S 1915 PALACE OF  
FINE ARTS: GIANT REFLECTED  
COLUMNS RECALL UNSPECIFIED  
CLASSIC SETTINGS.

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**UP AND ABOVE:** San Francisco is most notably a city of up—going up on hills, of being above things. For people like me from the flat Midwest its exhilaration comes from that up-ness. A couple of my favorite places up high, on a hill, looking at things, are Vallejo Street just east of Jones, where the street goes up a little bit and then stops with a sweeping view over Telegraph Hill and the Bay. Beside you to the south, a brown-shingled Willis Polk house makes this place seem still and somewhere in the past.

Another place up above is at the corner of Union and Montgomery on Telegraph Hill where a few ancient buildings stand up all rickety, like a movie set, watching and waiting, for from the south come marching forward the behemoths of Montgomery Street.

A block north of this intersection is what should have been Filbert Street, but instead is uncertain, winding wooden steps crawling sharply down the hillside through bushes and shrubs.



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**ON GREENWICH, THE VEDANTA SOCIETY: INSCRUTABLE, WITH JUST ENOUGH TACKINESS TO SEEM REAL.**

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▼

**FAR AND AWAY:** The same drama attaches to distant views of the city. One of my favorites is from the east on Yerba Buena Island, if you can get off the bridge without being apprehended by the Navy. Other more leisurely vantage points are from Bridgeway, the main street along the waterfront in Sausalito or from Belvedere. It is also extremely pleasant to sit around the restaurants and docks at Tiburon and watch fog settle in over the City. San Francisco is perhaps the best city in the world to look at from some distance away.

▼

**ACTION SHOTS:** Sometimes the San Francisco experience turns into action—the action of a Sausalito Ferry, a movable place that lets the skyline come close and recede. Equally thrilling is the block on Filbert Street just east of Hyde which goes for half a block almost level, and then drops off sharply—the sharpest drop street in San Francisco.

Unsuspecting visitors from flatter cities can be astonished by this plunge.

▼

**CLOSE-UPS:** Sometimes the pleasures of the city are managed from a lot closer. The Palace of Fine Arts by Bernard Maybeck, built for the 1915 Fair, allows a charming view across its pond, and in the water, giant reflected columns recall unspecified Classic settings.

The Maybeck Christian Science Church in Berkeley is also a pleasure to snuggle up to—this time closer since nothing separates you from its complexities. Though built at the same time as Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park, this church, to my taste, is more of a thrill—looser and richer, more evocative.

In San Francisco the evocations often are very bizarre. The Vedanta Society on Greenwich is an invocation of places inscrutable, with just the right amount of tackiness to seem real. Downtown the Halladie Building on Sutter Street has an unlikely, fascinating glass curtain wall of gothic fantasy tracery.

There are places that envelope you, too, like the Garden Court of the Sheraton Palace Hotel, thick with suggestions of other worlds and times. The interior of San Francisco City Hall is famous now for having protestors firehosed down the grand stair, but before that and since, for balls and ceremonies needing a Beaux Arts Bombastic interior space. I like the lobby of the Fairmont Hotel, too. It hasn't City Hall's scale and grandeur, but is big enough and bold enough to carry the show.

*Continued on page 24*



# Charles Moore, Enthusiast

AN APPRECIATION BY WAYNE ATTOE

**M**Y EDUCATION at Berkeley twenty years ago left two striking memories. One, the conviction that architecture is a social act and the other, Charles W. Moore.

From Charles, in those days, I learned that the humblest of buildings can be more potent than the most effortful edifice. I saw him enthuse over "carpenter gothic"—

not for its rightness or wrongness, but for its undeniable passion and care: Someone wanted it that way, and took the trouble. Barns were apotheosized as well, their virtues just too numerous to recount.

And all of this wasn't just talk. Witnessing the genesis of Sea Ranch reoriented my life.

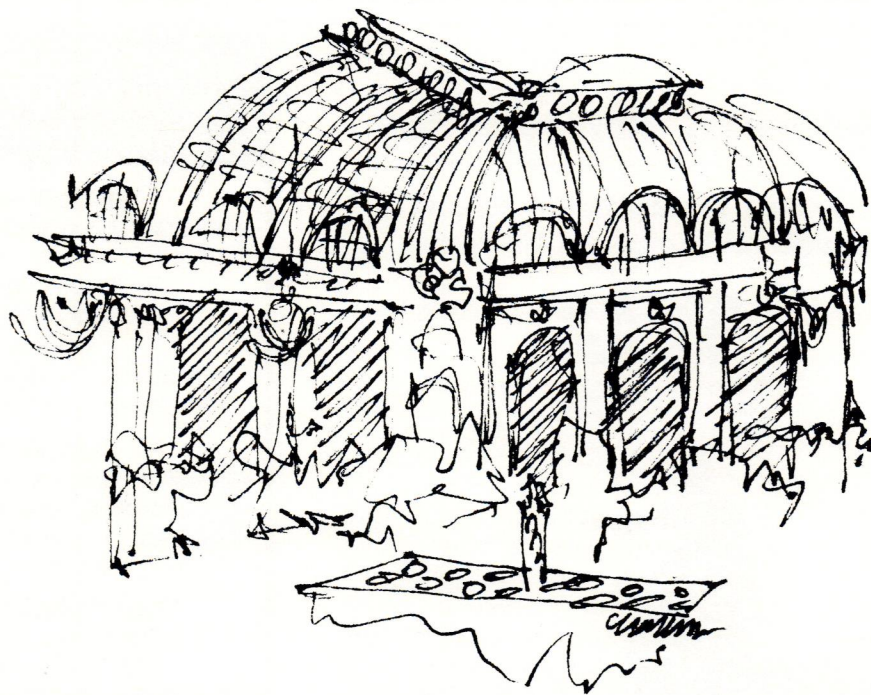
Charles was indignant in the 1960s over the desecration of San Francisco's gentle skyline. Nurtured slowly for decades, suddenly it fell prey to exploiters. The lesson: distinctive places should not be allowed to become indistinct. In the years since those passionate school days I have seen Charles become a witness for caring when others talk inevitability. I've seen him twinkle when others only can calculate.

Again and again in subsequent years I've been able to feel architecture

because, through Charles, I see that architecture is meaning-filled as much as it is anything else. Buildings are best when they are artifacts—in the anthropological sense—not mere objects.

Charles has moved on to other design realms and new stimuli. His Los Angeles work, for example, is very unlike that for Northern California. And increasingly his work embraces the other conviction mentioned above: the social act of listening and responding accordingly.

Recently I asked Charles about the San Francisco he recalls, what aspects of the Bay Region have stuck with him since he left twenty years ago. Not surprisingly, what he recalls and the way he recalls it (in the adjacent interview) evidence the value of place, of care, and 24-hour-a-day enthusiasm. □



THE GARDEN COURT OF THE PALACE HOTEL: THICK WITH SUGGESTIONS OF OTHER TIMES AND PLACES, IT ENVELOPES YOU.



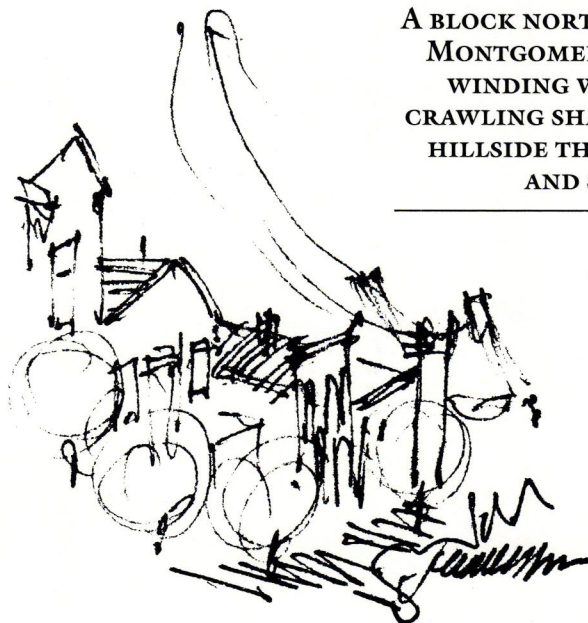
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## INSIDE OUT/OUTSIDE IN:

A space outside which manages to still work as inside is the eucalyptus grove towards the western edge of the Berkeley campus. Giant eucalyptus trees there make a place for peaceful contemplation of things not seen.

Other outdoor/indoor spaces very much worthwhile are a pair of made-over old buildings. Ghirardelli Square and The Cannery in San Francisco are full of excitement—spatial excitement and activity. Ghirardelli Square (by Wurster, Bernardi and Emmons), the gentler of the two, is perhaps better able to take the jugglers and activity makers that it exists for. The Cannery, which came after it, by Joseph Esherick, is to my mind more thrilling, though, for its Piranesoid escalators and suggestions of launching me through space.

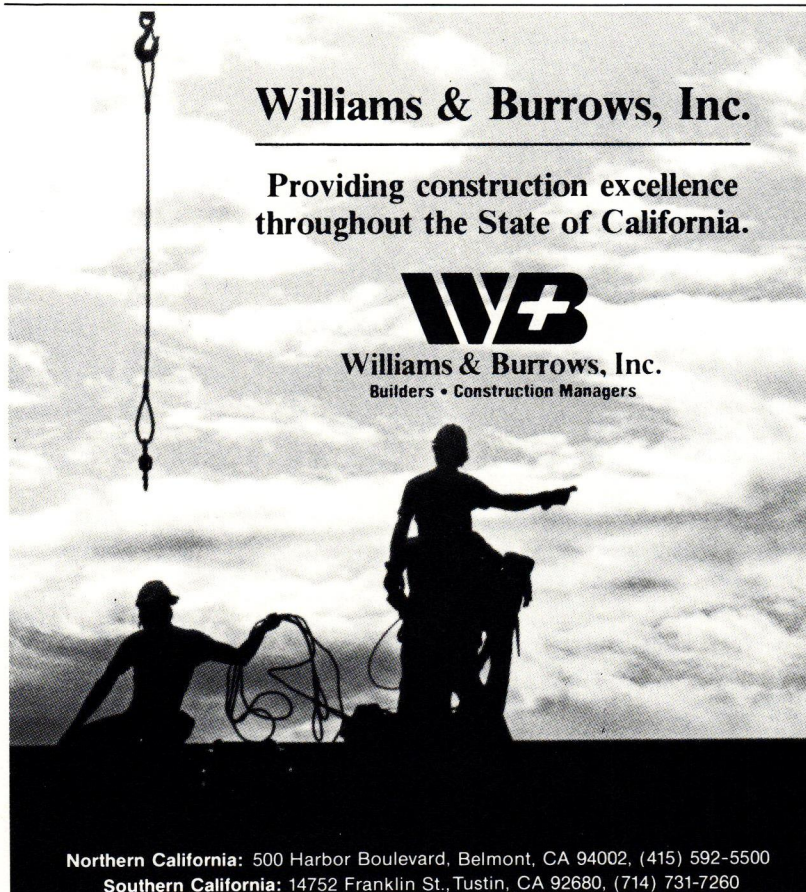
For classic peace in a place, and a suggestion of the good life in an earlier California, nothing beats the old campus at Stanford in Palo Alto.



A BLOCK NORTH OF UNION AND MONTGOMERY: UNCERTAIN, WINDING WOODEN STEPS CRAWLING SHARPLY DOWN THE HILLSIDE THROUGH BUSHES AND SHRUBS.

Like Charles Moore, Wayne Attoe left Berkeley, too, but then returned. He is a writ-

ing and publishing consultant to architects and engineers.



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# ACCIDENTAL AMENITIES: 'A Result of Pure Luck'

BY ROBERT COVEN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY VICTOR SMELTZ

**T**HE SOURCES of some of San Francisco's best architecture are hidden from us. Sally Woodbridge won't discuss them. Alan Temko won't write about them. The AIA won't honor them. They're not in the accepted architectural history books and none of them have received the Prix de Rome or the AIA gold medal. They're the unsung, unknown creators of San Francisco's accidental amenities.

Much of the charm and character that keeps our No. One industry, tourism, alive and well is a result of pure luck—the unintentional positive side effects of policy and design decisions. Sure, Polk, Maybeck, Morgan, Wurster and Moore have all contributed very nice and very well known architectural highlights to this area. You are, undoubtedly, planning to take your \$40 worth of S.F. guidebooks and view the famous sights of the city.

But what about the slew of valuable architecture created by anonymous benefactors—the remarkable creations

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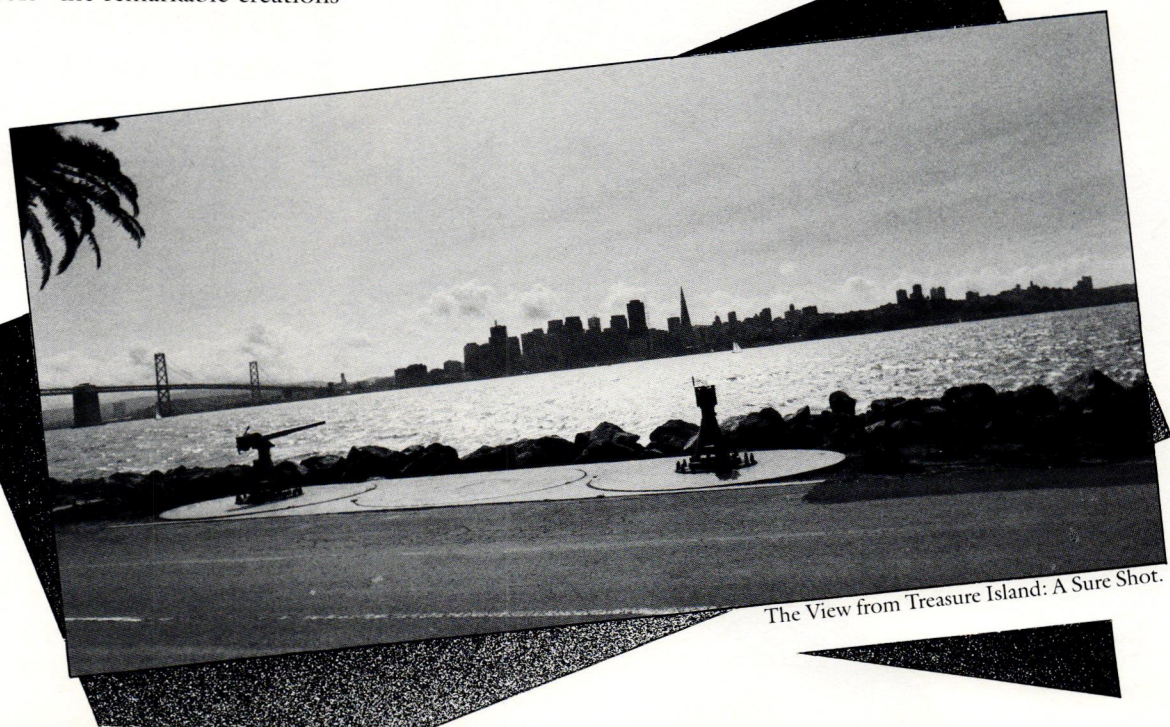
of the most unlikely sources: bureaucrats, political forces and the military?

The cityscape of San Francisco epitomizes the most fantastic results coming from the most ridiculous planning.

No one with any sense would impose a rigid, rectilinear street grid on an up and down city like this. No architect would have dreamed up such a simplistic solution, one so inappropriate to the topography. Bureaucratic surveyors answering the frantic pressures of the Gold Rush boom did the job. The results are just short of perfection.

True, our streets are not soothing to the inexperienced driver of a manual transmission Volkswagen who has just reached the summit of Fillmore Street only to find a stop sign. Seated in a posture like an astronaut aimed at the moon, with the bay behind—stall the car and it's 110 mph into the drink.

But the views are spectacular. From



The View from Treasure Island: A Sure Shot.



a distance, San Francisco is a gently undulating white-gridded carpet, broken by green squares and belts of park. From within the city, the grid stepping up and down the hills affords a vast proportion of residents with beautiful sea and city vistas. Wherever you live in San Francisco, you can usually see a quarter of the city and a quarter of the city can see you.

Changing social and political winds and whims have also provided the Bay Area with a diverse and interesting environment. The University of California at Berkeley's Sproul Plaza was built as a pedestrian walkway and plaza to cover what had been a public street—the dead end of Telegraph Avenue. By the historical accident of being the right place at the right time it became infamous as the site of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, one of the first of the student political protests of the 1960s. The steps of the Sproul Hall administration building provided the rostrum and the plaza the amphitheater.

Now, the winds have shifted and Telegraph Avenue has become filled with boutiques and cookie shops; political debate is muted. Today's student is

**WHEREVER YOU LIVE  
IN SAN FRANCISCO,  
YOU CAN USUALLY  
SEE A QUARTER  
OF THE CITY AND  
A QUARTER OF THE  
CITY CAN SEE YOU.**

more interested in the "big eight" accounting firms than the "Chicago Seven." This accidental forum is still active—witness recent apartheid demonstrations—though with less frequency and passion.

Creativity can show up in the most unlikely places. Anything flat or blank provides surfaces for artistic, political, religious or psychotic self-expression via the posting of handbills and the spray-painting of commentary. The Emeryville mudflats has become the site for three-dimensional statements on everything from earth mothers to missiles: sculpture to some, junk to others.

San Francisco has given itself a most unusual urban lighthouse. The tallest structure in S.F., the Sutro TV tower, is an orientation landmark visible from most parts of the city. At night, it is a beacon of flashing red lights, looming above the fog. On a clear day, you can use the spires of Sutro and Transamerica as a compass—urban big and little dippers.

City boosters consider world expositions and fairs as important in promoting an image of a thriving, cosmopolitan cultural center. San Francisco has had its share, two in this century. Both have provided the city with some extraordinary leftovers.

Marina Green is more widely used though less well known than its 1915 Pan Pacific Exposition cousin, Bernard Maybeck's Palace of Fine Arts. What started as utilitarian landfill has become the perfect place to meet and be seen by a large segment of S.F.'s BMW and jogging set—a place to, as the neologism has it, "network."

Another exposition leftover, Treasure Island, affords its visitors with a spectacular two bridge view. This product of the 1939 fair is particularly in-

**CONCRETE BUNKERS  
BUILT TO ENCLOSE  
THE BIG NAVAL  
GUNS ARE EMPTY  
OF BOTH CANNON  
AND PURPOSE BUT  
STILL FIND USE  
AS LOVENESTS AND  
PICNIC GROUNDS.**

Fort Point: Instantly obsolete red brick curio.



triguing at sunset when the sun can be seen sinking slowly behind the Transamerica Pyramid through the naval base's gun sights. The Navy took over the island during World War II and installed the guns to ward off Japanese attacks. Japan never attempted to take California by force (they've had much better results with their Toyotas than they ever had with their Zeroes). The guns, aimed so menacingly at the downtown skyline, were never called upon to protect it.

The majority of San Francisco's accidents were the result of a corpulent defense budget. Unused or little used military bases have become prime assets in the Bay Area. Military artifacts from World War II can be found high atop the Marin Headlands. Concrete bunkers built to enclose the big naval guns are empty of both cannon and purpose but still find use as lovenests and picnic grounds. From this high plateau it is possible to see a panoramic view of the Golden Gate: hills and shoreline to the north and cities and bridges of the Bay Area to the south and east.

The barracks of San Francisco's Fort

## ON A CLEAR DAY, YOU CAN USE THE SPIRES OF SUTRO AND TRANSAMERICA AS A COMPASS— URBAN BIG AND LITTLE DIPPERS.

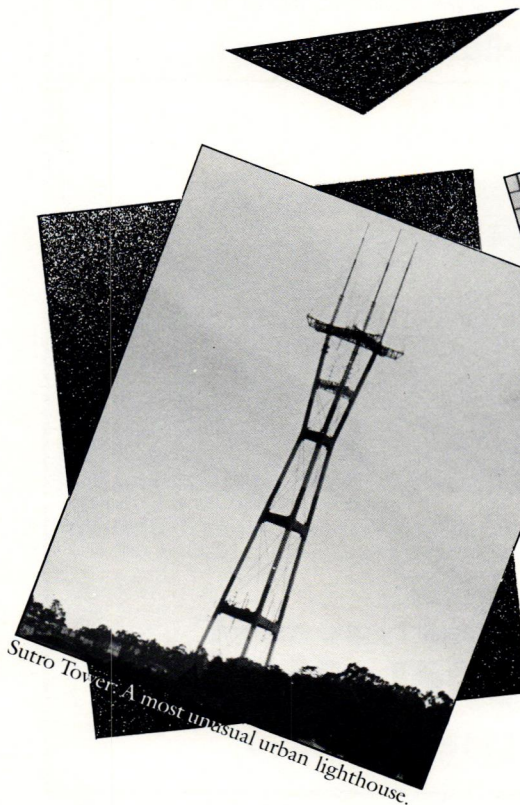
Mason now billet art galleries, ballet, theater, restaurants and non-profit organizations instead of soldiers. The Presidio, an active military reservation, has preserved a huge portion of northwestern San Francisco as forest, while providing the military with invaluable advertising material: "Join the army and you could be based at this beautiful northern California resort."

In a reverse of Treasure Island's history, Fort Point was built for the military in the mid-19th century and has now been converted to picnic grounds and promenade. The fort was built of

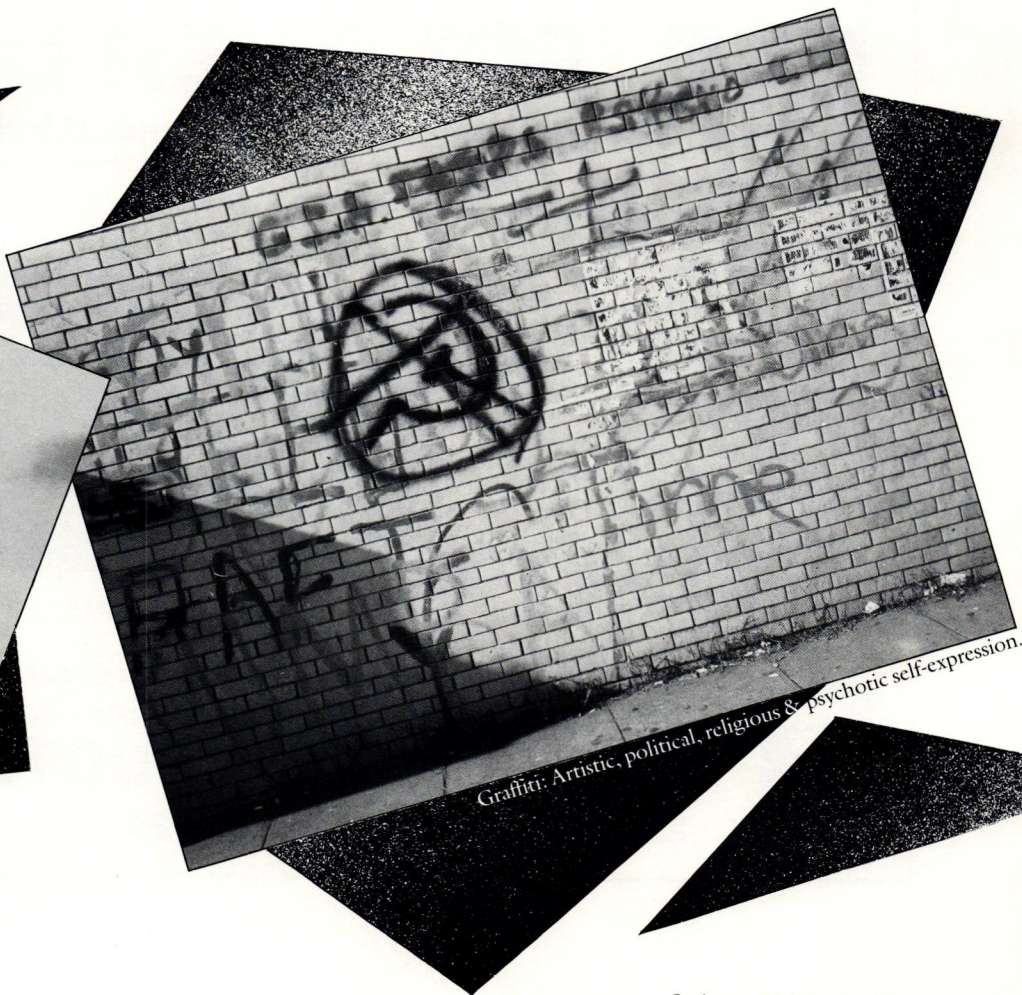
red brick to defend against cannon shot but, by the time the fort was complete rifled shot had been developed which could turn it to rubble. This instantly obsolete defense post was never called upon to fire a shot. It now provides visitors with an unusual view of the underside of the Golden Gate Bridge, surfers with the rare high S.F. Bay wave in a sheltered cove and a chance to visit a famous Hitchcock *Vertigo* scene.

Other communities can take heart, this country still has a large bureaucratic and military force, and there are ample opportunities for future accidents like those that have helped to create this beautiful area. MX silos may provide your community with much needed wine cellars. □

Robert Coven recently graduated from the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee with a master's degree in architecture. He is searching for the perfect niche between writing and design.



Sutro Tower: A most unusual urban lighthouse.



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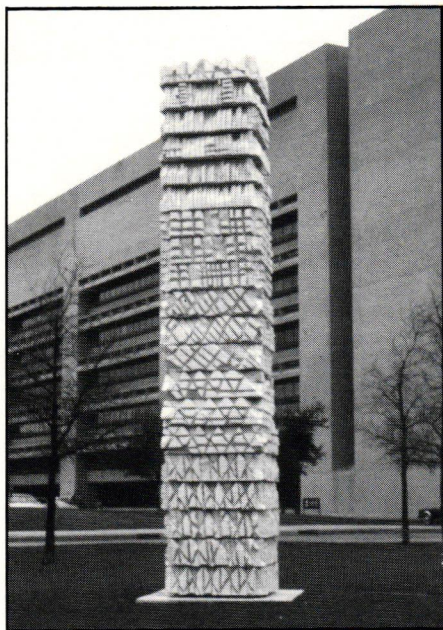
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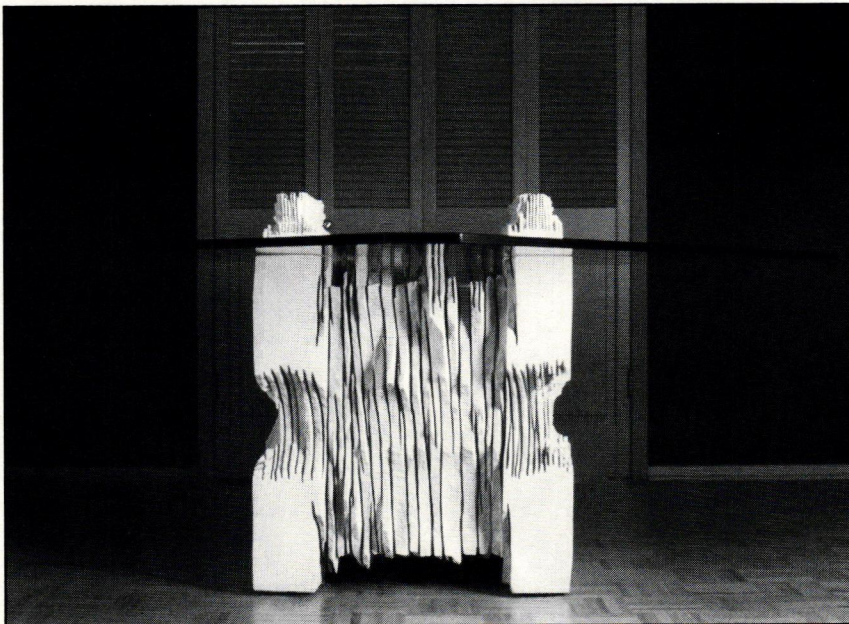
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